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SUBJECT: KANDAHAR: A GOVERNOR'S INTENTIONS

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Classified By: ADCM SIMMONS AS PER E.O. 12958 REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (SBU) Ambassador Neumann and senior Embassy staff had several meetings with the Governor of Kandahar, Asadullah Khalid, between December 26, 2005 and January 14, 2006. In these meetings Governor Khalid spoke about his intention to fight illegal poppy cultivation, detailed his problem with the misconception of the Alternative Livelihoods Program, shared his views on law enforcement challenges, acknowledged the security problem in his province and even commented on being considered for the Minister of Interior position. Embassy participants at other meetings with the Governor included the Charge, Acting DCM, the Counter Narcotics Task Force (CNTF) Director and Deputy Director, and the INL Director. Of special note, is his December 26th visit with the Ambassador where he was accompanied by MP Qayoum Karzai, who is a newly elected member of the lower house and also a brother of President Karzai.

2. (SBU) Partial Biography: Asadullah Khalid, also known as Asadullah, Haji Hassad (DOB: 1968). President Karzai sent Khalid to the province of Ghazni in April 2002 where he began the duties of governor prior to an official appointment. During this period he utilized several hundred troops to disarm the province and restore order. He was officially appointed as Governor of Ghazni in late May 2002. In July 2005 Khalid was appointed Governor of Kandahar.

Counter Narcotics

3. (SBU) The Ambassador acknowledged the earlier good work by Khalid during his Governorship in Ghazni and congratulated him on his appointment as Governor of Kandahar. One of Governor Khalid's first orders of business is to focus on the upcoming Governor led eradication campaign. He strongly supports the President's call for the Governors to lead eradication efforts in their provinces and wanted to set an example for his neighboring provincial (Helmand and Uruzgan) Governors. Khalid demonstrated this pledge by informing the Deputy Minister for Counter Narcotics at the Ministry of Interior (MOI) of his plans to commence eradication prior to the start of the Eid holidays which began January 10th. Khalid told the Deputy Minister that he wanted to make a psychological statement by eradicating fields in two districts so that the farmers in the districts can talk about it over the holidays, sending the message that his administration is serious about eradication. Khalid intended to recommence eradication efforts after the holiday expanding his eradication program to several additional districts. Through his submitted operational plan he requested assistance from the MOI in the form of tractor rental fees, local transportation for the eradication workers and police, food for them while working, and assistance from the Poppy Elimination Program (PEP) for verification. Interestingly, he has not requested MOI Afghan Eradication Force personnel support at this time and said that he believes he has sufficient local manpower to accomplish this phase of the eradication campaign.

(Comment: Khalid appears to want to do as much as possible on his Governor led eradication program without a lot of visible support from Kabul. Some believe that if his program is successful, it could garner him additional political capital among his constituents and show him as a strong independent Governor.)

4. (SBU) Khalid believes that Kandahar is a province where it is crucial for eradication to succeed. He commented that Helmand and Uruzgan are closely observing Kandahar's commitment to tackling eradication, and, more importantly, are monitoring the promised level of central government assistance to Governor Khalid.

5 (SBU) The Charge asked Khalid if he was satisfied with the level of support from the central government for this program and the Governor said although he received promises of

assistance, he is waiting to see if they are able to deliver.

He mentioned several recent meetings with the PEP Country Manager, Dr. Nabi Hussaini, and said he was satisfied thus far with the proposed Poppy Elimination Program plans for Kandahar. In spite of his concerns, Khalid appeared energized about overcoming these potential challenges and believes his eradication program will be successful. He stated his personal goal is to get as close to 100% eradication as possible.

16. (C) (Comment: Khalid,s response to the Charge differs from earlier comments attributable to him on this same subject. An official within the MOI stated Khalid has on several occasions complained about the ineffectiveness of the MCN, specifically Minister Qaderi,s ability to lead that Ministry, and characterized MCN as being &unresponsive8 to Kandahar,s needs. He is also quoted as criticizing the PEP team in Kandahar as being &lazy and not knowledgeable8 about the poppy situation in his province. We are looking into his assertions about the PEP team, however recent meetings with the INL PEP and eradication planning team, including the introduction of the new PEP International Advisor, seems to have resolved whatever issues the Governor had with the Afghan part of the PEP team.)

7.(SBU) Additionally, Khalid believes an important component in putting together a CN strategy at the provincial level is full commitment from local and regional leaders not to cultivate poppy. In addition to holding various meetings at this level, he also put together a twenty-three member &council8 comprised of local and regional individuals from the private and government sector. Their mission is to function as an extension of PEP and represent the Governor as his interlocutors and continue meeting with influential community leaders to maintain the anti-poppy cultivation dialogue. Additionally, this council has been tasked with providing the Governor feedback as to the eradication program,s effectiveness.

18. (SBU) Khalid said he recently held a series of &unofficial8 meetings with the Governors of Helmand, Uruzgan and Zabul (all of which surround Kandahar) to encourage and solicit their cooperation and commitment to enforce the cultivation ban in their respective provinces. According to Khalid, the Governors told Khalid they are all facing tremendous pressure from local groups to not participate in the Governor poppy eradication campaign because of the potential negative economic impact in their communities, and the fear of violent resistance from poppy growing interest groups. The Governor from Helmand expressed his strong concerns to Khalid about the potential for violence in his Province, and both Governors from Helmand and Uruzgan commented that they heard instances of farmers attempting to grow poppies intermingled with wheat. The speculation is that this might somehow dissuade the eradication workers from destroying both crops since one of them is legal and it would be virtually impossible to eradicate those poppies without also destroying the wheat. Note: We have not heard of any other reporting of this trend and our belief is that this would be a very inefficient way to grow poppy and the very discussion of such a tactic indicates farmers take the GOA,s eradication commitments seriously.

Mis-Understanding the Alternative Livelihoods Program (ALP)

19. (U) During his meeting with the Ambassador, Khalid asked for a clarification of the intent of the ALP during the eradication campaign. The Governor said he was encountering expectations from many of the district leaders that farmers whose poppy fields would be destroyed would receive assistance from the GOA. Khalid said he believes anyone who grows poppies should not be rewarded with this type of assistance and acknowledged a general lack of understanding among his peers and local leaders as to the AL programs intent and purpose. The Governor was advised the ALP was not intended to reward these growers and provided examples of what ALP was designed to do. The Governor was familiar with the seed and fertilizer program but not so with other AID programs that were ongoing, or ALP programs that were completed or in the pipeline. Several examples of ALP projects (both national and Kandahar specific) were cited by both the Ambassador and Charge during their separate meetings. The Ambassador said significant components of the ALP will have mid to long term benefits for Kandahar, adding that several were linked directly to building and/or repairing basic infrastructures throughout the country, i.e. power, water.

110. (SBU) Throughout the Governor,s meeting with the Ambassador, MP Karzai interjected comments that supported and bolstered Khalid,s plan for eradication. MP Karzai also shared the Governor,s concerns about the false expectations from ALP, and emphasized the importance of having viable and

visible ALP programs in their province.

11.(SBU)(Comment: A lack of understanding of USAID programs, specifically Alternative Livelihood Programs, has been a reoccurring theme we have encountered with many of the Governors involved with the operational planning phases of the upcoming Governor led eradication program. Part of the problem may be the title of the program itself. It is often interpreted by Afghan government officials to be a crop substitution program for the poppy growing farmers. In fact, many of the Governor led poppy eradication plans submitted to the MOI contained statements and requests that ALP be immediately available to those growers whose poppy fields are eradicated. We have been very engaged with both the MOI and MCN to ensure their message to the Governors is consistent and firm, that these growers will not be rewarded by any ALP programs as a result of their poppy crops being destroyed. Our CNTF Public Information strategy through their various media campaigns, reinforces this message and distinction. USAID is providing the CNTF Public Information team with specific information -- past, ongoing and projected rural development projects (many of which are ALP) that will assist our PI team in crafting messages that more accurately explain the ALP. In the very near future we will provide all of the Governors with detailed descriptions of both USAID & ALP sponsored projects in their areas. We will also develop talking points that should enable the Governors to better explain to their constituents what USAID, and more specifically what ALP is doing in their provinces; See Reftel A.)

12. (U) Ambassador Neumann emphasized the importance of soliciting input from local leadership throughout Governor Khalid's province for the type of ALP assistance they think they need. He added that input from these levels needs to be processed through the District and Provincial Councils and eventually his office for review, prior to submission to Kabul. The Ambassador commented that he has observed instances of decisions made by Kabul regarding rural development projects that did not take into account input from those local leaders whose communities would be directly (sometimes negatively) affected. Khalid also said that unfortunately, that was his experience as well. The Ambassador acknowledged many of these initial requests would likely be voluminous and would likely fall into the wants, versus needs, category. The inclusion of their requests at this point in the planning process, however, is a critical component in developing best practice governance as it would demonstrate these voices at that community level are heard.

13. (U) The Ambassador cautioned it was important their requests be prioritized for needs and feasibility and that these requests from those local level participants are accurately translated, and sent to Kabul in a timely manner. Even though in the end these requests may not be approved for implementation, he stressed the importance of letting these local voices know that they were heard. The Ambassador later said he would discuss an idea of a pilot project in Kandahar to ensure more local level inclusion in the request and development stage for ALP and other USAID projects with the Director of AID at Post.

14. (SBU) Khalid said he had been seeking additional financial support for CN and various development projects in his province and mentioned he recently met with Hanif Atmar, Minister of Reconstruction and Rural Development. At this meeting he said he sought an update about an earlier Canadian Embassy commitment to provide funding and we advised it was our understanding that the Canadians would assist, and told him the funds would likely come out of an \$8 million assistance package the Canadians agreed to provide. The Governor was told that we understood this commitment of funds was forthcoming.

Law Enforcement & Corruption

15. (C) Khalid described the structure and function of law enforcement in Kandahar as out of date, very inefficient, and plainly doesn't work. He attributes many of these problems to the current acting Minister Zarar's management of that Ministry and his inability to prioritize police assignments to high need areas. He cited examples in his province where districts had a total of 40 police officers, however in his estimation the need was for considerably more; in some instances 100. He commented that for police resource allocation to the provinces, the MOI was working off of very dated statistical data that does not take into consideration population growth in new areas within the various provincial districts. Khalid believes Helmand has these same problems. (Note: By in large, police are apportioned equally to all districts within the Provinces without taking into account law enforcement needs and priorities.)

16. (C) On his own, Khalid states he is attempting to restructure police resources in his Province, accounting for

the changes in demographics and law enforcement needs. One of his ideas has been to create what he calls quick reaction forces, - mobile teams that are able to respond to various parts of the district rather than stay almost permanently based in one location. He is also experimenting with a system once utilized years ago in several Provinces whereby local non-government community leaders were authorized (deputized) to make arrests for simple crimes and bring them to the police for continued investigation. This individual would also act as a spokesperson for the police.

17. (C) Another law enforcement program the Governor stated he is focusing on, &because the MOI is not, is the issue of highway control. Khalid sees a need to do more law enforcement operations along the known smuggling routes. He implied that corruption within the ranks of the highway police was a major contributing factor for their lack of success, but also acknowledged that corruption within police institutions in general is a very serious problem that needs to be aggressively addressed. Again, he cited lack of visible actions by the MOI on this front. The Governor said he is currently attempting to develop evidence against police officials in his Province, whom he believes are corrupt, for prosecutions. He did not provide any further specifics on this last point.

Secure Province or the Wild West?

18. (SBU) Governor Khalid was asked by the Charge to give his informal assessment on the security situation in his Province. He responded by saying he had noted some overall security improvements which he attributed in part to the operations and presence of the coalition forces. Khalid believes the influence of the Taliban throughout the districts is not as strong as it used to be, but was still of concern.

19. (SBU) The conversation then shifted to the recent spate of suicide bombings in Kandahar and he was asked to give his assessment on the situation. Khalid said the vast majority of people living in Kandahar province are Sunni Muslim and that suicide for any reason is against their view of Islam, implying that he was doubtful these bombers were from Afghanistan. He cited a recent suicide bombing where the police determined the bomber was from Pakistan and had studied at a Madrasa; NFI. Khalid said, &From what body parts remained, I examined the head of this bomber and it was clear he was not Afghan.8 He also said he intends to utilize local Mullahs to talk throughout the communities about how suicide is wrong and added that their message on this subject would have more impact than if were it to come from a Kabul based Mullah.

20. (C) The Governor acknowledged that security during the eradication operations would be important and he was taking this into account as an important part of his eradication planning process. MP Karzai added they had an unclear picture of the Taliban,s alleged role with threatening farmers if they did not grow poppy, and admitted that it was also not entirely clear if these actions were instigated by Taliban members, Taliban wannabes or, possibly traffickers themselves. He mentioned the overall security situation in the southern parts of Kandahar was &out of control8 , like the & wild West 8 , and half jokingly said he recently told his brother President Karzai, that &We might as well give it to the Pakistanis if we are not going to exercise any control over that area. 8

Possible MOI Candidate?

21. (C) The Charge said there was talk of the Acting Minister of Interior being considered for the permanent MOI position, and that recently Khalid,s name was also mentioned as a possible candidate. Although the Governor was cautious in his response, he gave indications that he was being considered by the President for the position. He said the President will make a decision upon his return from the London conference. (Note: GOA palace insiders have recently stated that the Governor is not a serious contender for the MOI position.)

22.(SBU) As though opining about what the Minister should do in that position, Khalid said it was critical that the MOI get out to the Provinces as much as possible to show a strong central government law enforcement presence. The Governor also said the Minister should reach out, and acknowledge and thank the veterans of past wars in the Provincial districts for their service to Afghanistan. He strongly believes this act would help in developing and strengthening relationships between and with these groups and that they could be influential in developing community support for the police. Khalid also acknowledged there was a serious problem of

corruption within the ranks of the MOI and said this should definitely be the priority for anyone who assumes that position. During a conversation about eradication he said he was pushing for the Minister of Interior to visit Kandahar at the beginning of the eradication season to show his support to his administration for this initiative, and to demonstrate that that Kabul is serious about this problem.

Final Thoughts and Impressions

123. (SBU) Governor Khalid is relatively young for his position and is in charge of the more important Provinces in regards to counter narcotics, security, etc. He has earned a reputation of getting things done through his own initiatives and does not appear to wait for Kabul to come to the rescue. So far his actions, at least on the CN front, are louder than words and we applaud him for his self-starting and aggressive initiative. Like other nascent Provincial administrations, he is also hampered by inexperienced staff not familiar with CN operations, but they are showing an ability to quickly learn.

124. (SBU) The Governor led eradication plan Khalid submitted to the MOI and MCN, one that we believe his staff authored under his direct supervision, was by far the most comprehensive plan submitted. The fact that he has already started eradication is encouraging and shows strong initiative, but his efforts are a little ahead of the overall game plan and our ability to fully support those efforts. We believe he intentionally started the eradication early to show it was his decision and that he was able to start without &forces8 from Kabul. He understands that he will only get credit and therefore financial support for operational expenditures for those fields that we can verify and knows this will be a non-negotiable requirement for all future fields he eradicates.

125. (SBU) We have scheduled a follow on eradication operational planning meeting with the Governor. The CNTF Director, along with INL program managers will meet with the Governor and his staff to finalize the operations plan, and demonstrate the technical methods to be used for eradication verification, as well as other PEP related topics.

NORLAND